



The California Master Plan for Education

Master Plan History

For almost 40 years, postsecondary education in California has been guided by the Master Plan for Higher Education, which outlines the fundamental principles—universal access, affordability, and quality—that guide California policymaking for higher education. Since its inception, the Master Plan for Higher Education has had an especially profound effect on postsecondary education in California by providing stability for the various postsecondary education systems and determining not only their roles, but the roles of state lawmakers as well.

Unlike the postsecondary education system, California's pre-K-12 education system has not had a clear framework to guide governance, function, or policy. As a consequence, the state's schools are limited in their ability to plan and perform.

At the core of the problem is a convoluted, multi-layered system of governance in which roles and scopes of authority are not clearly defined. Current education policy is governed by a variety of entities, from the Governor and the Legislature to the electorate, the courts, and the State Board of Education. Beyond these, there are numerous governing and administrative entities at the regional, county, district, and school-site levels. It is not surprising that contradictory laws and regulations are imposed on schools or that major policy shifts occur annually, often without adequate support. A Master Plan for all sectors of education will support student learning by defining the roles of all stakeholders so they are more complementary.

Beyond the need for structural changes and clearer lines of accountability, there is an increasing awareness of the need to develop one system, pre-K through postsecondary, with stronger linkages to community services and to the workplace. These linkages would benefit Californians who increasingly depend on educational opportunity at every stage of their lives.

It is in this context that in 1999 the Legislature convened a Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education and charged it with developing a plan to guide all aspects of education from pre-kindergarten through all levels of the postsecondary education experience. With the Master Plan for Higher Education serving as a foundation, the committee created a long-term, strategic plan for a single, seamless system of education from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary education that will produce better schools and higher levels of student achievement in every school, college, and university. The first comprehensive plan in the nation for a statewide system of public education, the California Master Plan for Education is a blueprint to meet the promise of high-quality education to every Californian.